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P-O'Leary, Jeremiah
Phillips, DAVE
SOC4.01.2 The Night Watch

Shedding Some Good Light on the CIA

By Jeremiah O'Leary

THE NIGHT WATCH. 25 Years of Peculiar Service, by David Atlee Phillips. Atheneum. 309 pages. $9.95.

This is the other side of the story about the Central Intelligence Agency, which, for the past several years, has been chastized with scorpions by both authors and a variety of investigative bodies.

Make no mistake. David Phillips, erstwhile chief of the Western Hemisphere Division of CIA and a 25-year veteran of what he calls "peculiar service," is on the counter-offensive in this well-written account of his personal experiences with the cloak-and-dagger. What gives Phillips credibility is his free acknowledgement of agency mistakes and even evil-doing on the level of assassination plots and mischief-making. But it is also persuasive that Phillips does not succumb to the shrillness of ex-agency employes like Victor Marchetti and Philip Agee, who have been in the forefront of CIA criticism.

Phillips resigned from the CIA when the investigations and denunciations were at a crescendo, not because he couldn't stand the heat, but so he would be free as a private citizen to speak out. He immediately founded an organization of former intelligence officers and has been on the podium and talk-show circuit ever since. The book is the culmination of his efforts and it is worthwhile to note that he has not imperiled the lives of any case officers or agents.

EVEN IF HE WAS NOT a partisan, Phillips' CIA career makes fascinating reading. He was a former POW in Germany and sometime actor before he went to Chile as a private citizen to edit a small English-language newspaper. It was there that the CIA co-opted him to act as an agent (someone hired on parttime basis rather than an officer of the agency itself.) In the Chile of a quarter of a century ago, he began fumblingly to learn the tradecraft of espionage.

He did so well that the CIA also retained him to handle the propaganda broadcasts which contributed to the unseating of leftist President Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala. After that, he joined CIA as an official member of the intelligence agency and had a rapid rise. Phillips was in Cuba during the rise of Fidel Castro and he played an important role in the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961, running the clandestine radio station on Swan Island that was to call all Cuba to arms when the Brigade 2506 landed.

But Phillips believes the Bay of Pigs failed because the easy toppling of Arbenz had led the CIA to believe Castro would also fall like a ripe mango and because high leaders from President Kennedy to CIA headquarters vacillated and changed their plans.

IN 1963, PHILLIPS WAS in Mexico City when word came of President Kennedy death. He writes that Lee Harvey Oswald's visits to the Soviet and Cuban embassies were known to the agency but that Oswald was just another meaningless blip on the radar screen. The station did query Washington about who Oswald was, but the cable inquired about "Lee *Henry* Oswald. According to Phillips, the Cubans and Russians rebuffed Oswald as a kook and the story of Oswald receiving $6,500 from a Cuban was "planted" by a Nicaraguan who hated Castro and hoped to provoke the U.S. into moving against Cuba in revenge for Kennedy's death.

Phillips writes that he knew nothing of the bizarre assassination plans cooked up at the agency against Castro, Lumumba and others and, in fact, played a key role when the U.S. State Department actually warned Castro in 1968 that he was the target of a Cuban-exile plot against his life.

As to the complex role of the CIA in the troubled affairs of Chile, Phillips explains it this way: the agency was involved in the so-called Track I plan to prevent the ratification of Salvador Allende as president in 1970 by using up to $250,000 to bribe Chilean congressmen and otherwise bring economic and diplomatic pressure to bear.

But Track II, which was designed to thwart Allende's election by any means, was an order passed to CIA Director Richard Helms by President Nixon in person and was to be carried out by the CIA itself without the knowledge of Secretary of State William Rogers, Ambassador Edward Korry or the deputy chief of mission in Santiago, Harry Shlaudeman. As it happened, Track II was dismantled before it ever got going. The CIA, according to Phillips, had nothing to do with the military overthrow of Allende three years later.

SOME OF THE THINGS he had to do caused Phillips inner conflicts about the ethics of spying and action decisions, such as the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965. It caused him personal pain when one of his own daughters, Debbie, exclaimed that what he had to do for the CIA was "dirty."

Phillips' book is a personal memoir about men and women who have worked for the CIA. He say he hopes it will help other Americans make up their minds whether the government of an open society can or should conduct secret operations. His answer seems obvious: yes, with restraint, with rigid controls and accountability and only for gathering intelligence, not taking action on it.

This is no defense of crackpot schemes for making Castro's beard fall out with chemicals or having him shot through the good offices of the Mafia. It is an explanation of how an accountable CIA can help the U.S. government to be informed about what other governments are up to. Although this is the personal story of one man, and a man I happen to know and respect, it has the effect of delineating what the CIA can do that is admirable as opposed to the things that can happen when the mechanism gets out of control.